



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020



Since my last newsletter to you we have missed one important meeting - our AGM which was to have been held in November and are about to miss one of the highlights of our year, the Christmas Meal. As I write there seems to be no possibility of our getting together in the coming months and I rather imagine you are all missing our get-togethers as much as I am but, sadly, there is nothing we can do about this at the moment.

It doesn't mean that nothing at all has been happening as the committee have been meeting on-line to discuss plans for the better days when they come. There are plenty of ideas of course. Some of the presentations that had to be cancelled can be resurrected and we're always looking for new ideas.

This is where you come in. Please tell us what you would like us to arrange for the future.



We will be happy to look at every suggestion and, even if it turns out to be impractical or impossible, we will have new ideas to work on.

Although some of the committee would have been open to re-election or replacement at the cancelled AGM, they have all agreed to carry on until the next.

In the meantime I want to thank Steve and Sandra for their contributions to this newsletter and I would love to receive anything that you would like to share with all your friends in the Wine Circle.

Most of all the committee would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas which, we hope, can be shared with your loved ones. And also a good new year - whatever that brings it can hardly be worse than 2020!

Ron

Chafor Wines posted this on Facebook:

"Thank you so much to everyone who has contacted me about volunteering to harvest this year. Sadly it's not been a good year for so many so I don't want to dwell on our bad news but sadly we were severely affected by frost in May 2020 and as a result we lost our ability to harvest any grapes this year. The vines remain healthy but no grapes. We still have lots of wine to sell though and have some new Oak aged Chardonnay to release as well as our first ever English Pinot noir wine available soon from the wonderful 2018 harvest ... watch this space. Thank you."

I attended one of their wine tastings in the summer, when they explained that three nights of frost in May meant their entire crop was lost on both of their sites. It was the first night of frost, on 11 May when temperatures were down to - 5 for several hours, which did the damage. The late frost this year has had the same effect on many other vineyards in England. Chafor were looking to buy in replacement grapes.

Steve Peart

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In January 2019 we were very lucky to spend a day at Penfolds Winery in the Barossa Valley, including a blending session in their laboratories. After putting on our fetching laboratory coats we were presented with Bin 138, a blend of Mataro (Mouvedre), Shiraz and Grenache. Our task was to try and replicate Bin 138 by working out percentages and mixing the three blends to get as near to the original as possible. You can imagine at first we took the measurements very seriously but after several calculations and numerous tastings percentages became less accurate. Needless to say we had great fun and left Penfolds feeling very merry clutching our own designer bottles. We recently had a tasting session with friends to compare our personalised blends and it was unanimously agreed that Nick's wine was the most drinkable!??



There are a number of Specialist Wine Merchants retailing the Penfolds Collection 2020 including Berry Brothers, Corney and Barrow, Laithwaites, Majestic and The Wine Society ; however, you can purchase other Penfolds Wine including Kanooga Hill Shiraz Cabernet and Kanooga Hill Chardonnay from Tesco and Waitrose which retail at around £9 to £10.

For more information on Penfolds wine www.Penfolds.com

Sandra and Nick Aldren

How much do we owe to Bacchus?

I love Christmas. There really is nothing like it in the calendar and I wonder if there is any religious festival in the world that is celebrated so much by believers and non-believers alike. As a wine merchant of many years I can tell you that sales in December exceed any other four months in the year. In fact, this year I had to make deliveries in Yorkshire and Kent before lockdown so that my customers there had their Christmas wine.

But where did all this drinking and feasting originate? And why at Christmas? After all, we don't spend a few months preparing for Easter and Whitsun has become almost forgotten.

There are lots of myths and theories - most of which can neither be proved or disproved but what we do know is that Christmas Day is an arbitrary date because Jesus was certainly not born in that month - shepherds would only be in the fields at night during the Spring - and not before 5 b.c as Herod would have been dead.

My favourite theory has been expounded many times and makes more sense than most. The Romans had always held a rather ambiguous attitude towards religion and most were accepted if they didn't harm others.



By far the most popular of their gods was Bacchus (the Roman version of the Greek god Dionysus). Bacchus was the son a god and a mortal woman who, after his death, was reborn each year. Not only that but, by the end of the first century b.c he had become more than just the god of wine but also a saviour figure with the power to grant an afterlife (does all this sound a bit familiar?)

Patrician Romans would have nothing to do with such a god and the Bacchanalian rites - at which all sorts of orgies were said to take place were good enough for the masses but not the ruling class.

Now in the mind of the simple people there wasn't a lot of difference between Christianity and Bacchus except that one allowed for lots of other gods - one of which was Mitthras whose festival, towards the end of the year, was a time for giving presents, drinking wine and enjoying the company of family and friends (and even the upper bracket approved of Mitthras). How were they going to convince people to give all that up for Christianity? Simple, call it Christmas - after all, weren't the Christians telling them that Jesus turned water into wine? To them he was beginning to sound a bit like Bacchus I suppose.

I imagine the Roman church would love to be able to go back and put history right but it wouldn't be as much fun or as amusing if they did. Drinking lots of wine and fussing over dates was one thing, orgies quite another (shame that, they sound as if they might have been a lot of fun).

We, on the other hand, can enjoy a festival shared by believers and others. Enjoy the wine, meet family and friends (please Covid??) And raise a glass or two to those we love.

Ron

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